



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE LOCAL DIVINITIES OF THE MODERN SEMITES.

### II.

---

By PROFESSOR SAMUEL IVES CURTISS, PH.D., D.D.,  
Chicago Theological Seminary.

---

THE most famous saint in the Christian calendar is St. George, or *Mar Jurjis*, who killed the dragon at Beirût, of which the bay bears his name. The monastery is said to be placed on the spot where St. George used to reveal himself. He is known among the various sects of Islam as *Khudḍr*. While his most famous shrine is near Kalat el Hosn, west of Homs and near Safita,<sup>27</sup> in northern Syria, he is associated with more places than any other saint. His shrines are found in all parts of the country, in buildings originally erected for him as well as in ancient Greek churches in the Druse mountains,<sup>28</sup> which during their occupation by Christians may have been sacred to the worship of St. George. At each of these shrines there is a tomb, or the representation of one, and at all these he is thought to reveal himself.

Such a self-revelation of a saint also takes place in connection with sacred stones.<sup>29</sup> But these stones are not of the sort with which one troubled by any ailment may rub his back or head,<sup>30</sup> where the question is whether the stones are used as charms and are supposed to belong to some saint, as at Berzeh. Nor are they like that at the shrine of St. Rih, which is revered by all sects, where there is a round stone like a heavy

<sup>27</sup> *Journal*, I, Safita, autumn of 1898.

<sup>28</sup> *Journal*, VI, Negrân, Tell Sha'f, Smed, summer of 1900.

<sup>29</sup> Among the Tongas there is a "natural stone about nine feet high, called 'the stone that is not to be pointed at;' people would not point at it on any account." (*Journal*, X, W. L. Thompson, M.D., spring of 1901.)

<sup>30</sup> *Journal*, XI, Hama, summer of 1901: "At Sheik Mustafa, in the center of the Maqâm, is a stone made smooth by rubbing. The sick man uses it for his back. He does not vow to it, but to the weli. The stone belongs to the weli, he is not in it. God blesses it."

ring, weighing five or six pounds, large enough to go over the wrist. The saint by means of this stone manifests his power. There are stones between which a bastard cannot pass,<sup>31</sup> as at a weli in northern Syria; there are upright stones between which a bridal couple must walk, as at a village in the Druse mountains;<sup>32</sup>



SHRINE OF KHUDDR SMED, CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE.

and there are stones which receive the sacrificial blood, as in the Sinaitic peninsula<sup>33</sup>

The stones used in healing are evidently not regarded as the places where the saints reveal themselves, but there are others which are more or less clearly considered as being the place of divine revelation.

<sup>31</sup> *Journal*, XIII, Mr. Faris L. Khuri, Damascus, summer of 1901.

<sup>32</sup> Private letter from Mr. Henry G. Harding, Kerak, winter of 1901.

<sup>33</sup> PALMER, *The Desert of the Exodus* (New York, 1872), p. 218.

At Sphene there is a Maronite shrine of *Mar Yehanna*, which consists only of an ancient stone, about three feet high by fourteen inches wide, in the shape of a panel, standing on a hill under a grove, near a modern church. The other sides are triangular [it is probably a part of the lid of a sarcophagus]. A man said of the remains of incense which were in front of the stone



MAR RISHA AT KARYATEN.

that the incense had been offered to the weli. His expressions seemed to indicate that he regarded the weli as residing in the stone.

[At] Karyaten, the last outpost for travelers making the journey to Palmyra, . . . in the vineyard, at the rear of the house of the governor of the town, known as Feiyad, is a prostrate pillar, by the side of which, about midway and close against it, is a structure of mud, about the size and shape of a straw beehive; in the side of this is a small hole, where the vessel is placed in which the oil that has been vowed is burned when a vow is paid. The shrine, consisting in this pillar, is called by the Moslems Abu Risha, and by the Christians Mar Risha. It is in honor of a saint of the sect of the Jacobites. The pillar is thought by the Syrian priest to mark the site of an

ancient church. It is surrounded by a low wall, leaving an inclosure about twenty feet square. The practices in making a vow and in payment of it among Moslems and Christians are the same. They come to the shrine and make their request; they also tie red and blue silk around the weeds in the inclosure as a sign to the saint that they want help. Payment, as has been intimated, is made in oil, which is burned at the altar.

Here, then, is a sacred stone, part of the ruin of an ancient church, which is revered by ignorant Moslems and Christians as a weli.<sup>34</sup>

At Sheik Sa'd, near El-Merkez, the capital of the Hauran, is a Moslem place of prayer; within this, just in front of the prayer niche, is the "Weli Sakhret Ayyub," or "Shrine of the Rock of Job," seven feet high and about four feet wide.<sup>35</sup> It is a monument of Rameses II., having a representation of his head in the right-hand upper corner, and an inscription in hieroglyphics. It is significant that the stone is in front of the prayer niche. Here is undoubtedly a case of syncretism, of Moslem and ancient Semitic worship combined. Unfortunately this is only a theory, which did not occur to me at the time when I visited Sheik Sa'd, hence there was no opportunity to put the theory to the test; but I have no question that the natives regard it as a sacred stone. There can be no doubt that such a stone, in such a position, would be considered by the ignorant Moslem as the dwelling-place of the weli. Indeed, this supposition is all but proved by the name "Weli Sakhret Ayyub."

The most conspicuous example of the existence of the ancient worship of rocks or stones, as the abodes of spirits, is found in the popular belief of ignorant Moslems that a weli resides in the "Rock Chair" (*Kalat el-Kursi*), or "Chair of the Companions" (*Kursi el-Aqtab*). While those who are more orthodox say that the companions of the prophet Mohammed come on Fridays, and find their abode in a room which the

<sup>34</sup> See my article, "Ancient Shrines in Northern Syria," in the *Independent*, Vol. L, pp. 1448, 1449.

<sup>35</sup> *Journal*, V, El-Merkez, summer of 1899. Cf. G. A. SMITH, "Notes of a Journey through Hauran, with Inscriptions Found by the Way," in the *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, 1901, p. 349. The inscription has been read by Erman.

servant of the shrine has never seen, the ignorant believe that they are to be found in the rock itself.<sup>36</sup>

There are quite a number of passages in the Old Testament, notably, though not exclusively, in Deuteronomy, chap. 32,<sup>37</sup> where "Rock" is as much a term for God as El or Elohim. These two last terms belonged to other branches of the Semitic family as well as to the Israelites. In the same way it seems likely that the term "Rock" was used by other Semitic stems for the divine being, as well as by Israel. There are various Old Testament passages where the term "rock" is predicated of God as "fortress" or "stronghold" would be predicated,<sup>38</sup> but there are others where it is as truly a designation of God as El or Elohim. May it not be that this name for God among the Semites goes back to a time when a rock was looked upon as a medium of divine revelation? It seems pretty clear that, while rock is used in some passages as fortress is used in others, there are passages where "Rock" is as spiritual a designation for God as Elohim, and where it is used with reference to its original Semitic signification.

It seems quite clear that when Jacob took the stone which he had put under his head as a pillow and raised it up as a pillar, poured oil upon it, and called it "house of God" (Beth Elohim),<sup>39</sup> he was on the same plane as the ignorant Moslems today, when they conceive of the weli—who is practically their God—as dwelling in a rock.

The most remarkable use of stones that I have seen is in connection with the shrine of the prophet Job (*Nebi Eyyub*) at Busan in the Druse mountains. In front of this shrine are three

<sup>36</sup> *Journal*, X, Kursi el-Aqṭab, summer of 1901. "The common people believe that the spirits dwell in the rock." "Any day you can summon them by prayer; Friday is better, and the day of sacrifice (*ḡaḡiyeh*, the tenth of the pilgrim month) is the best of all. There is a room where ten companions meet; only those to whom God has revealed it know where it is." "While, then, the common people think that the ten leaders (*aqṭab*, that is poles, leaders) are in the stone, the representative Moslems present what they think is a higher idea, namely, that they meet in a room."

<sup>37</sup> Deut. 32:4: "Ascribe ye greatness unto our God. The Rock, his work is perfect." Cf. vss. 15, 18, 30, 31; also 2 Sam. 23:3; Isa. 30:29 (Rev. Ver.).

<sup>38</sup> Ps. 62:2.

<sup>39</sup> Gen. 28:18, 19, 22; 35:7.

broken pillars, three and a half feet high. They are the only examples I have seen of the pillars (*mazzeboth*) of which we read so often in the Old Testament, which seem to have been regarded as legitimate at one period of Israel's history—for instance, at the conclusion of the covenant at Mount Sinai, when Moses set up twelve pillars in connection with the altar.<sup>40</sup> This use of pillars, which appears to have passed without reproof in the earlier history of worship,<sup>41</sup> was condemned in the Deuteronomic code<sup>42</sup> and the Deuteronomic history.<sup>43</sup>

There are conspicuous instances among modern Semites in which saints reveal themselves in the neighborhood of sacred waters. Sometimes the saint seems to be considered merely the proprietor of such a stream as at Nebk, in the Syrian desert. The stream is regarded as belonging to the saint, rather than as the means of revelation. But it may be a question whether the distinction between the saint and the spirit of the stream is always clearly drawn in the minds of the people, since the defilement of the stream is regarded as equivalent to the defilement of the saint himself, as is evident from the language used.<sup>44</sup>

The Sabbatic fountain, in northern Syria (*'Ain Fowar*), is considered as belonging to St. George; and yet sacrifices are brought to the fountain rather than to the shrine itself.<sup>45</sup>

The hot springs of Callirrhoë (*Zerka Main*) are regarded as being under the control of a saint (*weli*) or spirit (*jinn*) who makes up the fire and keeps it burning. The natives, who go to be healed of their rheumatism, invoke the spirit to keep up the fire, so that the water may be hot, and to this end they offer sacrifices.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Exod. 24:4.

<sup>41</sup> Gen. 31:13; 35:14; Hos. 3:4; Isa. 19:19.

<sup>42</sup> Deut. 7:5; 12:3; 16:22; cf. Exod. 34:13.

<sup>43</sup> 2 Kings 3:2; 17:10; 18:4; 23:14.

<sup>44</sup> *Journal*, X, Damascus, interview with Rev. J. Stewart Crawford: "One section of the village attributed the saint's displeasure to the fact that another section had performed certain religious ablutions in the courtyard of the shrine, and that the dirt had come on the saint to his disgust."

<sup>45</sup> The *Independent* (personal visit, autumn of 1898), Vol. L, p. 1447, note 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Journal*, VIII, interview with Mr. Henry G. Harding, at Kerak, summer of 1900: "The same custom obtains when they visit the hot springs (Zerka Main). They

At Hama, in the court of a lunatic asylum (which is simply a place where the insane may be kept securely by putting the most violent in irons), there is a small pool or fountain which is called a weli, and which is visited by Moslem women.<sup>47</sup>

Such sacred waters, and many more which might be mentioned, are of the same sort as those described in some manuscripts of John 5: 3b, 4, containing additions which are excluded by modern textual scholars as not belonging to the original text. In 5: 2, 3a we read:

Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a multitude of them that were sick, blind, halt, withered.

The additional matter in vss. 3b, 4 is evidently an outgrowth of the old Semitic belief in sacred waters under the control of a spirit:

waiting for the moving of the water: for an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

There are numerous examples of sacred trees, among Syrians and Bedouins, from one end of the country to another. Some of these are at shrines and are sacred merely as the property of the saint. They are as inviolable as anything else that belongs to him, or that has been put under his protection. At the same time they may be conceived of as sacred from the general

believe that the furnace is in charge of a jinn, who must be invoked before he will make up the fire to heat the water." Mr. Harding heard a man all the time he was in the bath invoking the spirit. Cf. *Journal*, VI, Zerka Main, summer of 1900: "After lunch Mr. Forder and I went to the source of two of the springs bursting out of the mountain. Over them were sticks on which the Arabs sit wrapped up in their abbas, and thus they get vapor baths. Mr. Forder says they offer sheep, taking them by their legs and dipping them in." *Ibid.*, Arab camp, nearly two hours from Zerka Main: "The Arabs say that they consider the hot spring at Zerka Main a weli; so whenever anything is the matter with their flocks they offer a sacrifice."

<sup>47</sup>*Journal*, XI, Hama, summer of 1901: "At the insane asylum of Hama there is a pool to which they take the robe of a troublesome child, and wash it. . . . The reason for the virtue is that in the pool is a certain weli. . . . He is the patron saint of all insane people. He appears at night and blesses the insane by touching them." At this so-called asylum I saw a stalwart madman with a heavy chain about his neck. The only modern asylum in Syria and Palestine is at Asfuriyeh, near Beirût, founded recently by Mr. Theophilus Waldmeier.



notion that the saint reveals himself through the medium of trees.

There are many such which are apart from shrines, which are believed to be possessed by spirits, to whom vows and sacrifices are made. Such trees are often hung with rags or bits of cloth.



A SACRED TREE HUNG WITH RAGS.

It is not easy to determine the significance of the rags. Some say they are designed to be a constant reminder to the saint of the petition of the worshiper, like a string tied around the finger;<sup>48</sup> others say that the rag taken from the ailing body of the suppliant, and tied to one of the branches, is designed to transfer the illness of the person represented by the rags to

<sup>48</sup> *Journal*, I, Karyaten, vineyard of Feiyad, interview with Rev. J. Stewart Crawford, autumn of 1898: "They also tie red and blue silk around the weeds in the inclosure (of *Mar Risha*) as a sign to the saint that they want his help."

the saint, who thus takes it away from the sufferer and bears it vicariously himself.<sup>49</sup> Sometimes the man who is ill takes a rag from the tree, as one tears off a bit of the pall from the cenotaph of the shrine, and carries it about on his person, and so enjoys the advantage of virtue from the saint.<sup>50</sup> It may be that in this use of rags we have the same idea as that found in Acts 19:11, 12:

And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: insomuch that unto the sick were carried away from his body handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them and the evil spirits went out.

There is no doubt that in the minds of the people sacred trees are places where spirits reveal themselves. Near 'Ain Fijeh, one of the sources of the Barada, thought to be the ancient Abana of Scripture,<sup>51</sup> is a weli, called Sheik Riḥan, decorated with flags. A peasant woman said that it was customary for the people to make a vow to give such flags to the weli if their petitions were fulfilled; she spoke as if the spirit were in the tree.<sup>52</sup>

Doughty mentions angels, or "the power of the air," who come to a sacred grove, under whose leafy canopy one who is ill lies down and finds recovery, while one who is well and who takes the same liberty receives only a curse for his presumption. Flesh is hung upon such trees as if it were the food of the spirits residing in them.<sup>53</sup> There is a similar custom of hanging meat in the branches of the trees among the Tongas, though my informant was not certain what was the intent of the natives in this act.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup>*Journal*, X, Beirût, William Van Dyck, M.D.: "The suppliant who approaches a sacred tree tears off a piece of his garment and ties it to the tree, by which he commits to the weli his sickness; he then takes a bit of a rag from the tree, which he carries about with him, and by which he receives healing from the tree."

<sup>50</sup>See the *Independent*, journey of 1898, *loc. cit.*, p. 1448. Similarly the teacher at Mehardeh in northern Syria told of a sheik among the Ismailiyeh who carried about some of the hair of the sacred virgin in his keffiyeh.

<sup>51</sup>2 Kings 5:12.

<sup>52</sup>*Journal*, X, 'Ain Fijeh. The woman "spoke as if the spirit were in the tree, and only said that she asked God when Mrs. John Crawford, of Damascus, who was my interpreter, reminded her that it was wrong to pray to a tree."

<sup>53</sup>*Op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 449.

<sup>54</sup>*Journal*, X, interview with W. L. Thompson, M.D., spring of 1901.

It has been pointed out that we have two clear traces of sacred trees in the Old Testament: one instance is the burning bush, upon which Moses looked, wondering that it was not consumed, and out of which God spoke<sup>55</sup>—an obvious adaptation of a divine revelation to the idea of ancient tree-worship, though distinctly differing from the superstitious notions connected with such worship. A similar vision was lately seen at a *weli*; a holy man at Nebk reported that he saw a sacred walnut tree in flames, which was by the shrine of the saint.<sup>56</sup> The other instance is the sound of the going in the mulberry trees for which David was to wait;<sup>57</sup> this was nothing less than the divine voice speaking to the sweet singer of Israel, in accordance with ancient conceptions.

Trees under which saints rested are considered holy.<sup>58</sup> Here there is the same notion as with respect to sacred places among the ancient Israelites. The seat of a theophany was ever afterward regarded as sacred, for where God had revealed himself once he was likely to reveal himself again. This is clearly indicated with respect to the Mount of Yahweh, which must have been understood to indicate the site of the temple, for we read: "And Abraham called the name of that place 'Yahweh sees;' as it is said today in the Mount of Yahweh, 'he is wont to be seen.'"<sup>59</sup> Indeed, *all* the ancient shrines of Israel had been consecrated by some theophany, and men went there in the expectation of its repetition.

Trees are also objects of worship. The term *weli* is applied to them; hence a saint is conceived of as residing in them. In a certain Turkish village in northern Syria there is a large and very old oak tree which is regarded as sacred. People burn incense to it and bring their offerings to it precisely in the same

<sup>55</sup> Exod. 3: 2-4.    <sup>56</sup> *Journal*, X, Nebk.    <sup>57</sup> 2 Sam. 5: 24.

<sup>58</sup> *Journal*, X, Beirût, interview with Dr. Van Dyck: "There is a wild myrtle in the valley below . . . which is referred to a man known as the Lord, who is believed in by the Druses, and who passed through the country working wonders; as he journeyed he rested under trees, which from that time on assumed miraculous powers."

<sup>59</sup> Gen. 22: 14. This was most likely written in the belief that Abraham received a revelation from God on the site of the temple.

way as to some shrine. There is no tomb of any saint near it, but the people worship the tree itself.<sup>60</sup>

The discussion of caves as the dwelling-places of spirits is germane in this connection, if we consider that there is a point in Semitic thinking where there is no essential difference between deity, saint, and spirit; although there is undoubtedly a tendency to differentiate these beings, to give God the highest place as the author of good and evil, the saints the next place with much the same functions as God, and to distinguish between beneficial and harmful spirits. But it is quite likely that the original Semitic conception was much simpler—that the primitive idea of a divine being was that of spirits who might be friendly or hostile to men. When we remember that the sacrifices to spirits are precisely of the same sort as those to saints, and that sometimes the distinction between the spirit and the weli does not seem to be clearly drawn—as at Zerka Main he may be considered a weli, or may be regarded as one of the jinn—it is evident that the notion of divinity is not sharply defined among the ignorant, whose minds furnish the most perfect mirror of ancient views about divine beings.

There are doubtless many caves to be found in Syria, some of which are conceived of as being under the control of a weli, and some as inhabited by jinn. One of the former class is resorted to by mothers who have an insufficient supply of milk for their children;<sup>61</sup> a second is a place visited by married couples who are childless and who desire offspring.<sup>62</sup>

It is common, in the district of Kerak, for those who occupy caves, while engaged in harvest, to present sacrifices to the spirits to whom the caves belong, so that they may be favorably inclined to those who seek to be their tenants for a time.

Near the foot of Mount Carmel, above the sea, is a cave which is said to have been tenanted by the prophet Elijah; it is

<sup>60</sup> The *Independent*, *loc. cit.*, p. 1446.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1447.

<sup>62</sup> *Journal*, X, summer of 1901. An American physician, living in Syria, who is childless, said "he was recommended by a native to visit a cave near Juneh, where barren women go attended by their husbands. There is a pool in the cave. They first bathe together in the cave, and then expect their marriage will be fruitful."

visited by all the sects, and is known by the Moslems as *Khuddr*. I visited the cave last summer and had an interview with the Moslem minister, or custodian, who said, when speaking of the income which came to him through the well: "*Khuddr* is my God and my father's God; he has supported us for years."<sup>63</sup> Thus there was put into concrete form a confession which expresses the belief of many an Arab and Fellah as to the being upon whom he depends in the hour of his distress, and who exerts the greatest restraint upon his life.

---

### A Meditation.

---

**Mark 8: 34.** "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself."

When Jesus spoke these crucial words to his disciples and to the multitude, he was but uttering his own experience. He was denying himself. He asks no more of us than he asked of himself. What, then, is this deepest test of discipleship? Not denying ourselves certain things that we should like to have or to do. Not stoicism over again. It is renunciation of self, as Christ renounced himself. We are no longer our own, but Christ's, as he was his Father's. No longer self-centered, but Christ-centered. Is not this the dreariest, hardest sort of self-denial, the dwarfing of personal independence, the very destruction of personality itself? By no means. It is the truest coming to oneself. It is the divine contradiction, saving life by losing it. For self-renunciation is fruitage of the highest of motives, for the sake of Christ and the gospel. It links us with him, the Prince of life, and with the universal spread of his kingdom. It redeems us from a sordid selfishness to a life of largest liberty, of fullest purpose, of deepest satisfaction, of loftiest achievement. What more could we ask? Christ is a good Lord.

J. M. ENGLISH.

THE NEWTON THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTION,  
Newton Centre, Mass.

<sup>63</sup>*Journal*, XIII, Haifa, summer of 1901.